

PSB

I discovered Bob Dylan when I was 12 and when I saw Pete Seeger sing Hard rain and Who Killed Davey Moore in concert at the beginning of the summer. I went away to camp and I didn't really pay attention to who he said wrote the songs, if he said. He probably said it. And then I went away to camp that summer and Blowin' in the Wind by Peter, Paul and Mary was a huge hit, they played it on AM radio all the time but they never said who had written it they just played the songs.

And then I got home and my family had moved from the city to a small town in new jersey and my brother came back from a different camp and a camp where a lot of people were into folk music because it was a left wing camp and he told me about this guy named bob Dylan who was following in the path of woody Guthrie and we had both grown up listening to folk music. Our parents didn't have many records, they had a couple of records, but I know who woody Guthrie was, I didn't have to find out who woody Guthrie was through bob Dylan, I came from the other direction.

And my brother played don't think twice on the guitar and over the summer he learned to play the harmonica and he had a harmonica holder and either that very night or the next night Dylan was on TV on the educational station I think, on this show about freedom songs and he sang only a pawn in their game and Blowin' in the Wind, and he looked to me just like Woody Guthrie and then we got Freewheelin' and I was listening to that and of course songs like Masters of War but also songs like Corrina Corrina and even Bob Dylan's Blues, when he sang 'the lone ranger and tonto came riding down the line fixing everybody's troubles, everybody's but mine', I thought that was pretty fucking funny and that November we saw him at the Mosque Theatre in New Jersey, it wasn't anywhere near sold out. We had seats in the balcony and in the second half we moved up to like the 10th or 8th row or something, we were terrified because we were kids. We didn't t do that at concerts, but nobody was sitting there and we didn't get bothered. and he sang some song songs off freewheeling, and there had been an article on him in Newsweek magazine that come out maybe a couple weeks before the show which said he didn't write Blowin' in the Wind, that a kid in a New Jersey town did Blowin in the Wind, had written Blowin in the Wind, and it also had that Dylan's name wasn't really Dylan it was Bob Zimmerman and at the show Dylan, when he sang Blowin' in the Wind, said here's the song Newsweek said I didn't write. He did a lot of songs I didn't know at the show, like talking john birch, he usually did a couple of talking blues, the Walls of Red Wing, he may even have done Restless Farewell, and Who Killed Davey Moore and The Times They Are A Changin' and Hollis Brown

and Hollis Brown was set to the music of this old ballad called Pretty Polly and I knew that the first time I saw him sing it because I had a record of Pete Seeger singing Pretty Polly. But that didn't bother me because I knew that's how folk music worked. Then two months later that January I walked into a record store and was looking through the records and there was the times they are a changing and I just went boing! It was probably my first instant buy if not the first album I bought myself. And I took it home and it was on the turntable a lot for the next six months and that song The Times They Are A Changin', I mean when it had that verse about 'come mothers and fathers throughout the whole land don't criticize what you cant understand' that was pretty much it for me, I was like 'oh my god, this guys saying what I'm thinking' but also songs like.. well the whole album, songs like The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll and With God On Our Side, in fact, With God On Our Side was the encore at the concert in Newark and so that really kicked it off for me.

And then that summer, at the end of the summer another side of bob Dylan came out and there weren't any political songs, any freedom songs, any protest songs and my brother and I had a subscription to sing out the folk magazine and the editor of the magazine Irwin Silber had written an open letter to bob Dylan...

(Interrupted by Tony asking about ordering food)

the reason I wanted to write something about Bob Dylan is that its not just that he's a brilliant songwriter, he's a great, great singer. He's a great singer and also in terms of song writing obviously he's written kinds of songs, he's written songs that have come from deep within and he's also written songs that haven't come from deep within but he does things like , well, I Pity The Poor Immigrant is a good example. I had John Wesley Harding, and for like 12 years I was trying to figure out what that song was about because none of the interpretations that I read in any of the reviews of the album made any sense. Robert Shelton said it was about Vietnam, others thought it was about immigrants coming to America and after Slow Train Coming came out I decided I might as well check out the bible, so I read the bible treating it pretty much as a book and lo and behold in the old testament in Leviticus during exodus there's this section called the blessings of obedience, where Moses talks to god and the Jews are in the desert fleeing Egypt but they're messing up, and god is talking to Moses and god is saying if they don't start acting right and believing in me and paying attention to me 'their heaven will be like iron, their tears will be like rain' and I just went "hold shit, what kind of person writes a song from that perspective where the I is God?", but if you go back and you read any of the interviews where Dylan talks about John Wesley Harding starting with the interview he

gave to sing out magazine to Happy Traum in 1968 he says 'I'm not in the songs', the 'I is another'. And he has maintained that about that album throughout in all of the interviews. More than 20 years later when he did the song talk interview with Paul Zollo said the same thing, so he's remained consistent in that regard, in the interviews where he's not putting people on, and that's one of the things that shows his brilliance to me as a songwriter and the other thing is his sense of humour. Now when I first saw him in the 60s especially at the Halloween show at philharmonic hall, he was hysterical, he was really funny and as his writing progressed and he got into the symbolist poets like Rimbaud and his songs got in a sense more obscure, so you go, what is this about, what does this mean? People started taking him way too seriously, not that he didn't deserve to be taken seriously but they elevated him to such a thing that they missed that things were funny, like desolation row is hysterical and the first time he sang it which I saw at forest hills stadium in 1965 when he goes "one hand is tied to the tightrope walker the other is in his pants", the audience laughed hysterically and he delivered it with comic timing. Twenty years later other people would come along who weren't around at the time but everything became this irreverent thing and a lot of the time he's just kidding, there's even line sin Brownsville Girl which are hysterical like "the only thing we knew about henry porter was that his name wasn't henry porter" and so I wants to write something coming from that angle, but also coming from a strictly musical angle.

If I had interviewed Dylan, what I wanted to do unlike say Mikail Gilmore was not necessarily talk about the lyrics but talk about the music because what he slowly has done over the course of his career is explore just about every form of American music there is. You know he started with blues and old folk ballads and blues has been the one constant throughout his career and you could make a real argument that he's really a blues singer, the only album there isn't a strict blues song on is times they are a changing, there's not really a blues song on that album,, thought there's a song with the words blues in it, but every other album has a song that is blues structured or blues patterns. He started doing folk and blues and then went *back* to rock n roll, and Elijah Wald in his book on Newport is the only Dylan person who wrote about Dylan that I've read that approaches Newport that Dylan played rock n roll in high school then went to folk, and that is the correct way to historically to approach it because he did play rock n roll in high school, but he moved through country music and even though what a lot of people think are his country albums I don't think are his country albums, though he did a third of self portrait where he was in Nashville with Nashville musicians cutting covers of classic country songs and so that's what I wanted to write about and I also wanted to get in the never ending tour, and even though I've written probably close to

100 reviews of never ending tour shows for me a good part of the never ending tour was Dylan learning how to lead a band for the first time because when he went on tour in 64 and 65 backed by Levon and The Hawks and then Levon left, anyway The Hawks who later became the band, they were musicians who pretty much knew how to do it, on stage anyways, with the songs that they did, it didn't work out that way first in the studio and then when he finally returned to the road (1974) they were with him again and they pretty much did the same thing, the same approach. And then the next band he had after that was kind of the opposite, the rolling thunder band, which was this rag tag ensemble of musicians from all over, you know, Mick Ronson...but they somehow made it work and the sound on rolling thunder a lot of people talk about the thin wild mercury sound, well that was on blonde on blonde but the rolling thunder revue wasn't the thin wild mercury sound and then he went on tour it was with the gospel band and they were all pros and so they kind of knew what to do, so he didn't really have to actually lead the band because he had great musicians backing him that knew what to do and then of course he didn't that weird European tour in 1984 with all European musicians and you cant say that's one of his great bands, because he doesn't like to rehearse, I mean he does rehearse but you know he's like 'however it gets played is how it happens'.

And the next big tour after that was Petty and that was another established that was already happening so when he finally decided to drop the background singers and all that excess and go out with a little four piece band, at first with G.E Smith, he was probably the leader maybe, or as they're called now, musical director, not that's an official title I think that's something that fans assign to it, and then when G.E left that was when he really had to take charge and lead things for the first time, the only problem was he'd decided he was a lead guitar player, which he wasn't, so it took a really long time for that stuff to gel, to me it gelled at certain points along the way, it was never as great as it could have been. I remember going to a show and I think it may have been after Larry Campbell joined I forget,....

Interruption....

So anyway I saw Dylan and Van and Dylan opened the show but the point I'm trying to make is Van's band was so much tighter that I thought to do this show he really needs The Band behind him because there was such a difference in the two bands and how tight they were and it wasn't that Dylan's band wasn't tight, it just didn't have the same force that Van's band did and so a large part of what I would have written about the Never Ending Tour despite of my reviews was that it took him a really long time to really take charge of the band to get it to where he wanted, not that I always agreed

with his moves and what he did with certain songs. The whole thing about having like two really great guitar players there and he would take the solos, was just ridiculous, it wasn't that he couldn't play guitar, because he can, but he's not a lead player.

(interruption)

Van's band made Dylan's band at the time look like amateurs.

Basically he had to learn how to lead a band and I don't think he got there till 1999 or Love And Theft. Everything that he was doing in 99 and 2000 it was all leading up to Love And Theft but also he went through periods, he went a big bluegrass period, actually a Stanley brothers period more than any other bluegrass people and Johnny and Jack and people like that and then he started moving towards Western Swing, although he never completely got there he sort of went in the opposite direction and all of that eventually led to the Sinatra stuff although it wasn't till ten years later.

The albums after Love and Theft he kind of stopped writing from deep within and one of the ways I know that is that even the songs on Love And Theft, I didn't even really want to sing them - some of them were too hard to learn - and even if I did learn them they didn't stay with me very long. And later I learned Pay in Blood and I did it like once and had no desire to do it again.

Love And Theft stayed in my CD player for 6 months if not longer and I considered it in a lot of ways in a sense to be his most autobiographical record, like those lines in Honest With Me like he never wanted to go back to his home town and his parents advice were still oozing out of his ears, I felt like that was really him. A lot of people were like 'why is he doing honest With Me again?' and I think he was doing it because of those lines.

But after that it was kind of like, there were times he was trying, but he really wasn't getting there. Workingman's Blues on one level is a beautiful song but it doesn't quite get where he wants it to go. Maybe if I went back and listened to those records again they'd hit me in a different way sometimes that happens, but, the one thing was he was definitely concentrating on the music aspect of things, from getting the band to be what he wanted it to do, of course it was always different in concern and you know the bands changed, for a long time they were doing this thing where he'd play a riff on piano and Donnie Herron would be watching him intently, echo that riff and pass it on to the band and the band would riff on whatever that riff was for a while, but these days Donnie Herron is not watching him so intently anymore. Its taking like sometimes known and more often obscure rock n rolls riffs whether its forms surfing music, the beach boys or some old rockabilly guy and

putting his songs to that, it doesn't always work, its fun in concert but it doesn't always musically work and because in a lot of songs eventually he'd return to his original way of doing it - sort of. Like It Ain't Me Babe he's done it in like a thousand arrangements. So I wanted to cover that aspect because I didn't see anyone else doing it.

I never wanted it to be a biography. That part of it isn't important to me. All these people make a big deal of his high school and the high school auditorium and that stupid restaurant Zimmy's, yeah id like to see his town but I don't want to see his house painted with the blood on the tracks album on the garage, I could give a fuck about that shit.

The thing about seeing him last shows I saw it was like man he wasn't singing that good ten years ago. I mean I think he put out too many albums of the Sinatra stuff, the only one I have any desire to put on is the first one because he took those songs, like he picked the most depressing ones he could find.